



**THE  
AMBULANCE  
STAFF  
CHARITY**

# **Bereavement handbook**

**Ambulance staff**

## No-one likes to think about their death.

People can have very different reactions to death and talking about it isn't easy, however taking a bit of time to have an honest conversation with your loved ones, while uncomfortable, will provide some much-needed comfort and stability if the worst was to happen.

This handbook has been created to provide information and guidance to support ambulance staff. We'll cover:

- How to have a conversation with your loved one about death
- Things to think about when funeral planning
- Practical things you need to think about to protect your loved ones
- How to deal with the loss of a colleague
- How to support your colleagues with their grief
- Where you can access support



## A little bit about us...

TASC, The Ambulance Staff Charity, is a leading national charity that supports the mental, physical, and financial wellbeing of the UK's ambulance community. We're here to provide independent and confidential support to ensure the UK's lifesavers are strong, healthy, and resilient. Because they care, we care.

As well as serving NHS staff, we also support private ambulance staff, retired staff, ambulance service volunteers and paramedic science students.

To learn a bit more about us, visit the links below:

- [What TASC does](#)
- [Who TASC supports](#)
- [TASC's services](#)
- [TASC's impact on the ambulance community](#)

# Let's start talking about death

When an ambulance worker passes away, the grief can seem almost unbearable for their loved ones, especially if it was sudden or traumatic. It's also a very confusing time as families adjust to their loss alongside dealing with the paperwork and difficult decision-making.

Unfortunately, some of this can't be avoided, but one simple thing you can do now to make this time easier for your family is talking about death and what sort of funeral plans you'd like.

Even if you don't know the details of what you want, you may know what you don't want, and letting your family know this is just as important.

We've seen many times when an ambulance worker has died and their family members have not known what to do and struggled to make decisions, asking themselves 'is this what they would have wanted?' or 'have I done them proud?'



## Tips to starting a conversation

### Don't surprise someone

Talking about death can be difficult, and surprising someone with the topic can be quite jarring. Instead tell them that you want to make some time to talk about death and your funeral plans, and the reasons why. Agree a date/time for you both to talk and make sure you give yourself enough time to think about it beforehand.

### Respect their feelings

It's important to take your loved one's feelings into consideration and avoid pushing them into talking if they don't want to. Instead explain why you want to talk and then tell them you'll pick the conversation up at another time.

Many ambulance staff also have a darker sense of humour than most, and a joke you make to lighten the mood may accidentally cause your loved one to become upset, so approach the topic carefully.

### Make dedicated time to talk

Choose a quiet and comfortable place where you can have a face-to-face conversation where you won't be disturbed. For example, avoid talking when getting the kids dinner ready or in a busy café. Don't forget to set your mobile to silent too.



## Things to think about when funeral planning

Here are a few topics you can bring up to start a conversation:

- Details of your Will and if it needs updating (more information on this topic is available later in this handbook)
- Details of your designated next-of-kin at work (more information on this topic is available later in this handbook)
- Details of any life insurance policy or funeral cover you have to help pay for your funeral
- Do you want to donate your organs?
- What type of funeral do you want for example, faith-based, humanist or a celebration of life?
- Do you want your ambulance trust to be involved in your ceremony? (more information on this topic is available later in this handbook)
- Is there any music you'd like to have at your ceremony?

- Do you want to be buried or cremated, or do you have something more specific in mind, such as a natural burial?
- Do you want flowers or do you want donations to a charity instead? [Learn more about in-memory donations here.](#)
- Is there anything you'd like to be buried/cremated with, for example clothing or tokens?
- What do you want to happen after your ceremony? Do you want a Wake?

Over the page we've created a table that you can print off and fill in to help you keep track of what you've discussed about funeral plans.



## Funeral planning

### Organisation and finance

e.g. insurance policies, funeral directors

### Service details

e.g. venue, faith/humanist ceremony, burial/cremation

### Employer involvement

### Tributes

e.g. flowers/in-memory donations to charity

### Music and readings

e.g. readings, prayers, songs, and hymns

### Participants and attendees

e.g. readers, pall bearers, family-only event/open event

**After the funeral plans**

e.g. wake, plans for ashes

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## Checking what you're entitled to

Anyone employed by an NHS trust will be eligible to access a range of benefits once they meet the qualifying period. These benefits include your pension and payments if you die while in service. To learn more about what you're entitled to, check the [NHS Total Rewards](#) website.

The website may also detail your employer's policies around what they will do if a team member dies while in service.



## Checking your next-of-kin

A simple thing, but something that can have an enormous impact on your family, is checking who's identified as your next-of-kin with your employer.

When you joined your ambulance service, you'll have been asked to identify a next-of-kin as part of your onboarding. If you die in-service, this person will receive any death in-service payments you may be entitled to.

Over time relationships change and the person you originally identified as your next-of-kin may no longer be the person you want to receive the payments.

Over the years TASC has seen several times when an ambulance worker has passed away and their death-in-service payment has gone to an ex-partner, and their current partner is left with nothing and must also pay for a funeral.

Contact your HR Team in the first instance to find out who is your current next-of-kin.

## Why it's important to write a Will

A Will is a legally-binding document which sets out what you want to happen to your property, possessions, money, and investments, called your 'estate', when you die. It can also cover who you want to take care of your dependent children if your co-parent has also passed away.

Additionally, your Will details the individuals or organisations that you want to receive your estate, called 'gifts'. For example, you could:

- Gift your children your house
- Gift 5% of your total estate's worth to charity

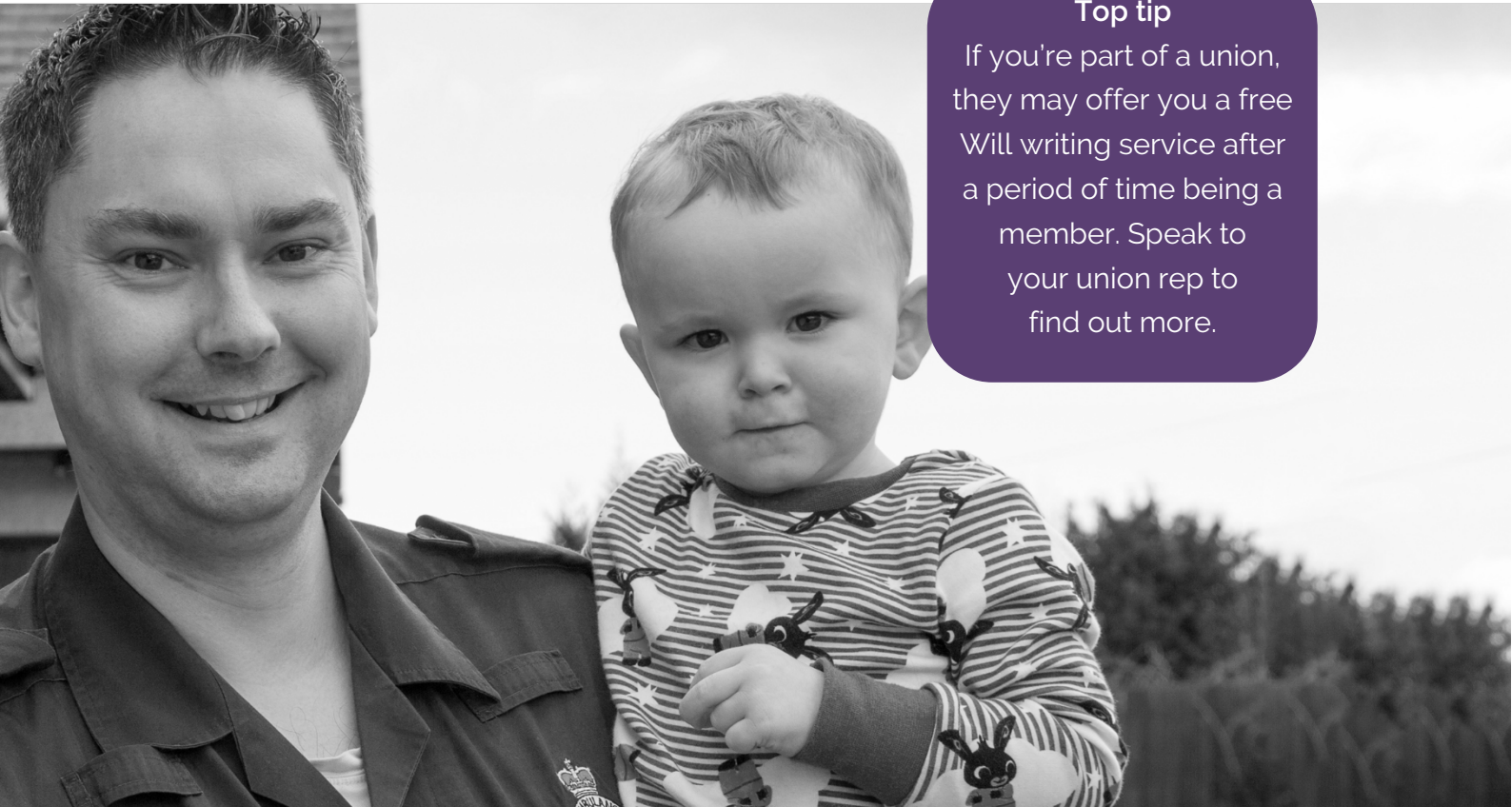
Many people think their estate will pass to their partner when they die, but this may not always be the case, especially if you're not married.

If you die without a Will, you will be 'intestate' and your estate will be divided following a set of formal rules which may not follow your wishes. More information is available on the [Citizens Advice website](#).

Making a Will is a simple way to ensure your loved ones are taken care of and that your wishes for your estate are carried out. To learn more about making a Will, visit the [Citizens Advice website](#).

### Top tip

If you're part of a union, they may offer you a free Will writing service after a period of time being a member. Speak to your union rep to find out more.





# Dealing with the death of a colleague

Your ambulance colleagues are like a second family, and when one of them passes away, especially if it's sudden or unexpected, many ambulance staff 'put on a game face' to try and help them cope.

Grief is an overwhelming emotion and everyone experiences it differently. There's no right or 'normal' response to loss, however, there are some common reactions and feelings you may experience in the hours, days, weeks, and months following a death.

## The stages of grief

### Denial

Losses can be difficult to believe as real and as you start to accept reality, you're beginning the healing process. However, the emotions you may have been trying to suppress could begin to rise to the surface.

### Anger

Anger is a natural reaction and it's not unusual to become angry with the person who has died and you may even resent them for leaving you.

Anger is possibly one of the strongest and most challenging emotions, but if you don't allow yourself to feel angry, you might find yourself lashing out or reacting in other unhealthy ways.

### Bargaining

Grief can make you feel vulnerable and it's not uncommon to look for ways to regain control. You may find yourself creating a lot of 'what if' and 'if only' statements.

### Depression

Depression after a loss can be extremely isolating. You may find yourself becoming withdrawn and feeling hopeless about the future, or that life is not worth living.

While depression is a normal phase of grieving, some people may get 'stuck' and not feel able to move past it. In these cases, you should seek professional help. [Learn more about TASC's bereavement services.](#)

### Acceptance

Acceptance is about acknowledging that someone is gone. It's not about 'getting over it' and doesn't mean that you no longer feel the pain of loss.

It's about coming to terms with how your life will be without that person. You may start to reach out to others and tentatively begin to live again, knowing that there will be good days and bad days, and that's okay.

**To learn more about how grief can impact your wellbeing, download [TASC's guide to grief and loss.](#)**

## Traumatic grief

If your colleague dies in a traumatic situation, it can be shocking, and you may find it very painful to cope.

### Suicide

When someone dies by suicide, it's common to be plagued by questions like 'why did they do it?' and 'could it have been prevented?'

You may also feel angry or maybe even guilty as you feel you could have done more to help.

Adults bereaved by suicide are also more likely to attempt suicide than those bereaved by natural causes.

If you're experiencing suicidal thoughts, TASC runs the Ambulance Staff Crisis Phonenumber to offer immediate and ongoing suicide and mental health crisis care. Completely independent, confidential, and available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Learn more about the service on [TASC's website](#).

## Violence

Death through violence, particularly murder or manslaughter, can be especially difficult to come to terms with. You may repeatedly ask yourself questions like 'why them?', 'how could this have happened?' and 'why wasn't it me instead?'

In the days, weeks, and months after a traumatic event, it's very common to feel numb, anger, and disbelief, and you may also experience feelings of intense unfairness and revenge.

When someone dies tragically from violence, it's common for it to be picked up by the local media or community and this can make you feel very isolated from your support network.

For more information about traumatic grief, visit the [Cruse Bereavement Care website](#).

## Things that may help when you're grieving

### Talking to someone you trust

One of the most helpful things you can do is share your memories of the person you've lost. There are many people you could speak to, such as your family, a friend, your ambulance colleagues, or a faith/spiritual advisor.

### Try some relaxation exercises

The physical symptoms of grief, while unpleasant and sometimes frightening, are natural reactions that will fade. Relaxation exercises, meditation, aromatherapy or breathing techniques can help you to relax and re-establish feelings of control.

- The NHS website has free [mental wellbeing audio guides](#) you can download
- Visit the Mind website for examples of [mindfulness exercises](#) you could try

### Create a memory box

You don't forget the person you've lost, but gradually you find new ways to remember them. Reminiscing about the past can be painful but creating a box full of meaningful items can be a powerful way to keep precious memories of them alive.



### Attend a memorial service or remembrance event

You may find it cathartic to visit the place where your colleague died or place a wreath somewhere that was special to them.

Since our inception, TASC has organised and hosted the National Ambulance Memorial Service to honour our fallen ambulance staff. The service is open to anyone who wishes to pay tribute. Learn more about the service [on our website](#).

To learn more about bereavement, download [TASC's guide to grief and loss](#).

# Supporting a bereaved colleague

When your colleagues are struggling, it can be hard to know how to help them. Some people may become withdrawn and others moody or angry. They may also use dark humour or a 'head down and carry on' attitude when dealing with their grief.

Many people worry that leaving their colleagues to grieve quietly can make them feel isolated, while also worrying about saying something and possibly making them more upset. This is entirely normal, but the important thing is to make your colleague feel supported.

## Tips for talking to a bereaved colleague

### Take them somewhere private

Choose a calm and quiet space that makes them feel comfortable to talk. Ideally this should be outside of work, but if that's not possible, you could take them off-site during a break, to a quiet meeting room or even in the ambulance cab between jobs.

### Think about your body language

If you sit down to talk, avoid sitting opposite them if you can. Sitting across from someone can create a tense atmosphere, instead sit next to them and mirror their body language.

### Be a good listener

Offering a listening ear is usually the most helpful thing you can do.

- Focus on them and let them know they have your full attention
- It may take time for them to verbalise their thoughts, if this happens, avoid filling any silences
- Use questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. This way you're encouraging them to talk and letting them lead the conversation
- Repeating something back is a great way to confirm you understand what they're saying and reassures them that they have your full attention

### Avoid pressuring them

If you know someone is struggling but they don't want to talk, ask them questions such as 'how are you feeling'. Don't pressure them to give any information. Instead, ask them if there is anything you can do to help.



## Other things you can do to support your colleagues

### Offer practical help

When dealing with grief, it's easy to forget or struggle with the little things in everyday life, such as filling out some paperwork. You could help by asking if you could take any of these little tasks off their shoulders for a time. However, be specific about what you can help with and only offer to help with things you're able to do.

### Help them set up rituals

Grief becomes more manageable over time, but you may find they struggle around anniversaries or special days. You can support them by helping set up little rituals to remember their colleague. For example, lighting a candle on their birthday or taking them to the National Ambulance Service Memorial Garden.

### Attend the National Ambulance Memorial Service

Since our inception, TASC has organised and hosted the National Ambulance Memorial Service to honour our fallen ambulance staff. The service is open to anyone who wishes to pay tribute, and ambulance staff from all over the country attend to remember their ambulance family members. Learn more about the service [on our website](#).





# Places to access bereavement support

## TASC

TASC can provide advice and bereavement counselling to people bereaved by the death of an ambulance worker. Learn more on [TASC's website](#).

## Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse is a national charity for bereaved people. Learn more on [Cruse's website](#).

## Samaritans

Samaritans is a national charity dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection. Learn more on [Samaritan's website](#).

## Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

SOBS are the only national charity providing dedicated support to adults who have been bereaved by suicide. Learn more on [SOBS website](#).

## At A Loss

At a Loss provides bereaved people with a place to go to find the support they need. Learn more on [At A Loss' website](#).

## WAY Widowed and Young

WAY offers support to anyone who's lost a partner before their 51st birthday. Learn more on [WAY's website](#).

# TASC rely on your support to continue providing our independent and confidential services for the UK's ambulance community.

Here are a few ways you can support our work and ensure we're here for ambulance staff for years to come.

## Leave us a gift in your Will

Leaving TASC a gift in your Will is a caring way to support our cause and leave a lasting legacy for the UK's lifesaving ambulance community.

- You could leave us a set amount. For example, you could leave us £500 which could pay for over 9 hours of support for someone struggling with PTSD
- You could leave us a percentage of your estate. For example, if your total estate is worth £100,000 and you leave TASC 2%, you would be donating £2,000 which could pay for 118 support sessions with TASC's in-house money expert
- You could also donate a specific item, such as artwork or an antique which we could auction off to raise vital funds for our cause

To learn more about leaving TASC a gift in your Will, [visit our website](#).

## Other ways you can support our cause

- Become a TASC regular giver and donate a few pounds a month. [Sign up now](#)
- Text AMBULANCE to 70085 to donate £3 to TASC now
- Plan a fundraising event with your friends and family. [Learn more here](#)
- Join our mailing list to receive our latest new, free resources and opportunity details straight to your inbox every month. [Sign up now](#)



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